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ABSTRACT

"Breadth of perspective" is a significant concept for definition of public goals, especially in line with the two-way symmetric model of public relations practice. The concept involves four components: (1) awareness that more than one definition, stand, or conclusion is possible and is probably accepted as valid by significant persons or groups; (2) awareness that there are, in all probability, differences between one's own position or definition and that of other people; (3) an inclination to take others' views into account when making and carrying out communication decisions; and (4) knowledge of arguments and their ramifications that support viewpoints opposed to one's own. So defined, "breadth of perspective" has roots in a number of disciplines and research traditions, including symbolic-interactionist sociology, personality theory within social psychology, political science, and communication. Three studies have shown partial determinants and implications of breadth of perspective. These include a survey of working journalists, a study of the public relations posture of osteopathic medicine, and a general-population survey relating to three political issues in Ohio. Breadth of perspective is important in public relations because it is in line with the libertarian heritage; it can lead, under many circumstances, to productive, flexible, innovative behavior and output; and it can help articulate and add substance to the two-way model of public relations practice. (Author/FL)

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BREADTH CF PERSPECTIVE -- AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

by

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Paper presented to Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, Florida, August 1984.

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ABSTRACT: "Breadth of Perspective -- An Important Concept for Public Relations," by Hugh M. Culbertson, Professor, E. W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University, presented to Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, Florida, August 1984.

This paper suggests that "breadth of perspective" is a significant concept for definition of public relations goals, especially in line with the two-way symmetric model of PR practice.

The concept is said to involve four components:

1. Awareness that more than one definition, stand or conclusion is possible and is probably accepted as valid by significant persons or groups.

2. Awareness that there are, in all probability, differences between one's own position or definition and that of other people. (In coorientation terms, congruency would then be at other than the highest possible value.)

3. An inclination to take others' views into account, as well as one's own, in making and carrying out communication decisions.

4. Knowledge of arguments and their ramifications which support viewpoints opposed to (or at least, different from) one's own.

So defined, "breadth of perspective" is shown to have roots in a number of disciplines and research traditions. Included are symbolic-interactionist sociology, personality theory within social psychology, political science, and communication.

Three recent studies by the author and colleagues are summarized, all suggesting partial determinants and implications of "breadth of perspective."

First, a survey of working journalists was said to bear on component 3 listed above. Traditional views of journalistic performance, stressing objectivity and emphasis on media institutions as businesses -- correlated with a self-defined tendency to follow one's audience in making news-judgment decisions.

Second, in a study of the PR posture of osteopathic medicine in Ohio, physicians and the general public were shown to have differing perceptions of certain osteopathic practices. Awareness by physicians that such differences existed (see points 1 and 2 above) appeared to bear on physicians' participation in a PR effort by a professional society.

Third, in a general-population survey relating to three Ohio state ballot issues, attention centered on component 4 (knowledge of arguments opposing one's own view). Media use focusing on state and local news correlated with such knowledge, but only among newspaper-dependent persons who were presumed to be active news seekers.

Literature relating to breadth of perspective was summarized with regard to five mechanisms suggested in the literature which appeared to bear on processes affecting the concept.

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This paper argues that "breadth of perspective" is an important concept for public relations practice and research. The author first encountered the notion some 22 years ago in a sociological essay.[1] Recently it has served as a focus of his own research.

The first two sections of the paper define breadth of perspective and discuss its role in several disciplines. A third section looks at its use in two sociological studies with public relations overtones. Then the author summarizes findings related to breadth of perspective in three of his own recent projects.

Definition

Warshay defined breadth of perspective as the variety of responses one calls to mind before tackling a problem. He saw a perspective as a symbolic structure which an actor brings to situations. The structure was said to consist of meanings or concepts, ideas, and values in differing states of clarity and coherence. A perspective serves as a frame of reference in defining situations.[2]

In light of this and other literature to be noted later, it's suggested that a person's breadth of perspective can be high in approaching an issue or topic only if there is:

1. Awareness that more than one definition, stand or conclusion is possible and is probably accepted as valid by significant persons or groups. In his classic definition of "public," Herbert Blumer specified that members must confront an issue, disagree about how to define and deal with it, and discuss it (apparently leading to a recognition that

differing views exist).[3] Grunig and Hunt see this definition as consistent with their "behavior molecule" concept for PR planning.[4]

2. Awareness that there are, in all probability, differences between one's own position or definition and that of other people. This would be defined as moderate or low (at least, less than perfect or the highest possible) congruency in the Chaffee-McLeod coorientation model.[5]

3. An inclination to take others' views into account, as well as one's own, in making communication decisions and carrying them out.[6]

4. Knowledge of arguments and ramifications which support viewpoints opposed to (or at least, different from) those to which one subscribes.

Review of Literature

In addition to its "home discipline" of sociology, the notion of breadth of perspective has shown up, as reported later, in the work of psychologists concerned with flexible, adaptive cognitive behavior. Also, it has played a role in an innovative mass-communication study by Chaffee and Wilson on diversity of people's news agendas[7] and in one by Edelstein on people's views about the Vietnam War.[8]

In the public relations area, Grunig and Hunt discussed four models of PR practice in their recent text,[9] and before this body one year ago.[10] They focused heavily on a "two-way symmetric" model which they regarded as at least the fourth step in the evolution of PR. Practitioners have long spoken eloquently of PR in this light, they suggest, but few have practiced in the two-way symmetric mode until quite recently.[11]

Analytically, two-way symmetric PR appears to involve operating in what Lee Thayer has called the diachronic mode.[12] At base this involves:

1. Entering a transaction with some thought of knowledge, opinions or behavior which one hopes to bring about in one or more transaction "partners."

2. Having a willingness and inclination to change objectives vis-a-vis these partners as one learns more about them and their contexts.

3. Having a willingness to change one's own beliefs and behavior as a result of what the partners do and say. In PR terms, this often involves changing client policy or practice--striving to live right, as well as let people know you live right, as spelled out in one definition of the PR function.[13]

This analysis clearly places a premium on recognition by a communication source that he/she probably has a definition which differs from that of receivers. Thus "breadth of perspective" lurks beneath the surface of Thayer's definition.

Such lurking also exists in Grunig's information-systems theory. In particular, the concept of problem recognition has a high value when one recognizes uncertainty with regard to a conclusion or decision. This, in turn, seems to imply a recognition that two or more conclusions are at least possible and merit consideration.[14]

Symbolic-interactionist sociology offers perhaps the most compelling rationale for paying attention to breadth of perspective, though not a very clear statement of what the concept means or how it can best be measured.

As described by George Herbert Meade, an infan. (here labelled P) becomes a functioning human largely by:

1. Behaving.

2. Observing how others react to that behavior.

3. Imitating that behavior by others, incorporating it (and accompanying evaluations and assessments of P) into P's own cognitive and behavioral repertoire.

4. Thus gaining the tools to define him/herself. Furthermore, since two or more others are normally taken into account, the maturing P learns that he/she can be defined and assessed in two or more ways. This realization, in turn, suggests that any one definition of P is arbitrary--not absolute and beyond question. Such definition permits P to see him/herself as object--as something to be evaluated and altered or reinforced adaptively in light of probable outcomes.[15]

As an aside, the author finds it useful when teaching PR Principles to discuss such "role taking" in connection with Daniel Boorstin's classic writing on pseudo-events. Boorstin says there's danger of exaggeration and insincerity--and of widespread cynicism--when people construct events mainly to gain publicity and impress others.[16] Maybe so. However, Erving Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life argues persuasively that we all "play to audiences" almost constantly so people will attend to, approve of, and/or respect us.[17] A pseudo-event such as a new-car unveiling differs in degree (being designed for many people and a chain of publics rather than for one or a few people), not in kind, from what all people do on a date, in a meeting, etc.

Two other interactionists, Ralph Turner and Thomas Scheff, have honed in on breadth of perspective, without calling it that, in seminal articles. Turner spells out three "standpoints" in increasing order of complexity and maturity:

1. The first-person standpoint. Here the role-taker, P, imitates the behavior of some other person whose role he or she takes. The result is more or less automatic acceptance by P of the other's assessment as his/her (P's) own. Infants tend to engage in such role-taking, as do adults when mental illness leads them to lose sight of the difference between reality and fantasy.

2. The third-person standpoint. Here P attends to another's assessment but sees it as separate and distinct from P's own. The separateness of the two or more viewpoints becomes salient, permitting P to compare P's view with others' and to alter his/her definition or question others' as seems appropriate and functional.

3. The standpoint of interactive-effect. Here P considers the joint implications of his/her own definitions and those of others. Subtle, intricate relational behavior--the stuff of good literature and drama--can result. For example, a salesman P can behave so as to make a potential customer feel P is "plain folk." The result of such a strategy may be a sale--if the potential customer likes ordinary people--even though P may continue with some distress (dissonance) to see himself as a sophisticate and not plain folk.[18]

Turner uses the term "reflexive" to denote role-taking in which P defines O's perception of P him/herself. And Scheff has noted an important dimension of reflexivity based on the fact that P can, in a special case of reflexive role-taking, define O's perception of P's perception of O. The situation is analogous to that of a TV set tuned into a program on which the camera is pointed at the set, which in turn contains a smaller picture of the same set, which in turn contains a smaller picture of that

picture, and so on in an infinite regress limited only by one's ability to detect small images.

Such depth of reflexive role-taking can be illustrated by a horrible ethnic joke involving two Russian laborers who are feuding with each other. P, the role-taker as defined here, assumes the following about his enemy, O:

1. O is afraid of P and would not like to spend a weekend in a city where P is located.

2. O recognizes that P does, in fact, consider O to be a liar.

3. O recognizes correctly that P dislikes O strongly and intends to gain revenge against O for a past misdeed.

Against this background, P comes home from work on a Friday and announces to his wife the two of them are going to a resort in Minsk for the weekend.

"O has been telling people at the shop that he's going to Minsk this weekend," P tells his wife. "Now, O knows I think he is a liar. Thus if he tells people he is going to Minsk, he probably assumes I'll think he is, in fact, going to Pinsk. He knows I'll probably go where i think he is in order to exact revenge, but he surely doesn't want to be where I am so this can happen. Thus he apparently wants me to believe he's going to Pinsk so he can spend a safe weekend in Minsk. He can't fool me: he's going to Minsk."

Much the same notion is expressed in the lyrics of a country song heard on American radio in the late 1970s. The song deals with a fellow and girl who meet in a cafe. The girl leaves the cafe in her motor vehicle, and the fellow follows her in his. The girl sings the following lyrics about her behavior during the ensuing ride:

"I was looking back to see
If you were looking back to see
If I was looking back to see
If you were looking back at me."

Clearly such fascinating subtleties in perspective-taking merit careful study by practitioners seeking to understand and improve their all-important "sensitivity" to others--an important aspect of interpersonal communication skill.

Also in the interactionist tradition, Pelz and Andrews, in a large-scale study of research-and-development laboratories, found that productive scientists tended to have frequent contact with a wide variety of colleagues. This held whether productivity was measured in article output, citations to one's work by other scholars, or rated esteem. The productive scientist also tended not to do research full-time. Teaching and administrative work appeared to help give (or perhaps reflect) a needed variety of perspectives.[19]

Pelz suggests that exposure to diverse viewpoints challenges the scientist. This, in turn, is said to build creative tension only when coupled with a sense of autonomy from organizational demands and recognition for past achievements. Autonomy and recognition help give a sense of security needed to pit one's own ideas against other views in a constructive way.[20]

Strauss and Rainwater expressed related alarm about the growth of new specialties in chemistry. As subfields proliferate, inter-specialty communication is apt to decline. As a result, the discipline may lose both a unifying theoretical focus and a creative clash and integration of

viewpoints.[21] (This concern, expressed by many chemists in a nationwide survey, surely has a familiar ring to communication scholars.[22])

In his organizational theory, Hage suggests that a concentration of varied specialists within a complex organization aids creative innovation.[23] Many organizational theorists, including Likert[24] and Argyris,[25] have also stressed free, open, purposive communication among diverse organization members as pertinent to a wide variety of organizational tasks and outputs.

In a branch of social psychology rather far removed from interactionism, work on the authoritarian personality dating back at least to Frenkel-Brunswik and colleagues in the 1940s and 1950s,[26] and to Rokeach in the 1960s,[27] has stressed a notion very similar to breadth of perspective.

In this tradition, slavish adherence to one set of world-shaping beliefs (called central beliefs by Rokeach[28]) was seen as leading to inflexible behavior as well as a lack of effective, flexible attention to one's environment. These factors, in turn, help bring about stereotyping and unchanging, prejudiced behavior toward large, varied groups of people.

In a recent extension of the authoritarian-personality tradition, Hampden-Turner argued that willingness to risk one's own view via active, questioning exposure to diverse others is a key element in the innovative, courageous, existential sort of person whom he admiringly calls "radical man."[29]

Proposing a quite different sociological interpretation, Stewart and Hoult attributed the inflexible, limited behavior and beliefs of high-authoritarians partly to restricted social environments of such people (who, after all, tend to come from isolated rural areas and homogeneous

urban ghettos which don't encourage inter-religious or inter-ethnic exchange).[30]

Given this background, according to Stewart and Hoult, the high-authoritarian often doesn't share meanings or experiences with diverse others. Thus he/she tends not to take novel or diverse perspectives into account. Further, when the parochial isolate does make such an effort, performance tends to be ineffective because the individual can do little but view different cultures in formulaic, stereotypic ways.[31]

In political sociology, Lipset has focused on two notions relating to breadth of perspective. Cross-pressures from different social groups and perspectives often lead people to withdraw from politics, he argued.[32] At the same time, the perceived opportunity for upward mobility (moving to a class level preferable to and different from one's own) can encourage people who perceive they disagree with authority figures to "work within the system" in a democratic way.[33] Also, Shils argued that political extremism often develops in the absence of "mutual adaptation of spheres rather than the dominance or submission of any one to the others."[34]

In the international realm, Schramm is one of many who have viewed communication as an important part of social-political-economic development because it prepares people to play new roles and assume new responsibilities.[35]

With this quick (by no means exhaustive) overview of varied disciplines and traditions, we now turn to public relations applications.

Two PR-Related Studies

A great deal of symbolic-interactionist work, based largely on the the participant-observer technique and in-depth interviewing, looks and

reads like insightful PR case-study material. Such research seems especially pertinent to the practitioner who, in following the two-way symmetric model, must take into account and deal with executives' and employees' socialization and training as well as with rather superficial publicity for and awareness by broad, general publics.

Bucher and Stelling investigated graduate programs, largely in psychiatry and psychological counseling. Their findings challenged the common belief that graduate education is generally a highly regimented process in which an all-powerful faculty molds neophytes in its own image and with its own particular governing perspective.

In some cases, students developed their own perspectives and derived self-assessments from these. Then students chose internship supervisors and/or major professors who seemed apt to validate already-existing self-assessments and criteria. Student and faculty perspectives, then, were seen as separate and rather independent. Student evaluation consisted of hunting for a match between the two, not of the faculty sanding off edges of square student pegs in order to fit these pegs into pre-determined, round, faculty-created holes.[36]

Matthews has done a book-length study of what might be called the PR posture of day-care facilities for elderly women. In the wake of 1974 federal legislation, the United States committed funds to constructing and running such centers. This required a new breed of professionals (or at least, expansion of an existing breed) to run the centers.[37]

The conventional wisdom held that the professionals were supporters and servants of the elderly, with both sharing a common definition of where the two groups were going, how and why. However, Matthews'

participant-observer data convinced her that the professionals and the elderly had conflicting perspectives which lay at the heart of potential problems.

In one center, for example, elderly "customers" sought to be active in politics in the tradition of the Grey Panthers. (After all, 70-year-olds aren't all senile and decrepit just because a law so defines them.[38]) Far from being supportive, the professionals covertly opposed the political bid by withholding information from the elderly.[39]

Why? Matthews contended that the professionals' jobs, and the legitimacy and importance of their work, hinged largely on the dependent, inferior status of the elderly.[40] Not a pretty picture if reporters happen to latch onto it, Matthews implies. And not a healthy setting for the birth of a profession (based, by definition, on a concept of broad, genuine public service[41]).

We now turn to a brief summary of elements which reflected the notion of perspective diversity in three recent studies involving the author.

Summary of Three Recent Studies

Newspaper Study

In late 1979 and early 1980, the author interviewed 258 reporters and editors on 17 varied American newspapers.[42] A major purpose was to test and further explicate the widely quoted finding of Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman[43] that American journalists adhere in varying degrees to two viewpoints about their work:

1. A neutral or traditional view stressing speed, objectivity, and traditional journalistic writing style (the inverted pyramid, the summary lead, short sentences and paragraphs, etc.).

2. A participant view calling for somewhat subjective interpretation as to causes, meanings and implications of events.

In the author's study, there appeared to be a clear-cut traditional viewpoint along with two other, clearly distinct belief clusters:

1. An interpretative view emphasizing careful research and basically using the scholar as a role model.

2. An activist position allowing for promotion within news columns of a cause or ideology.

In trying to figure out what these viewpoints meant as to news-judgment behavior, we proposed the news-orientation model--a kind of bastard offshoot of the McLeod-Chaffee coorientation model. As shown in figure 1, this model calls attention to three elements: the journalist's own assessment of what constitutes news, the journalist's perception of audience assessments, and the journalist's news-judgment decisions as reflected in projected or actual news play. One can obviously construct three measures of similarity, each focusing on one pair of variables in the model:

1. Congruency, the degree of similarity between the journalist's own assessment and that which she/he attributes to the audience. Stamm and Pearce,[44] and Brown, et al,[45] have emphasized congruency because it is a "link to reality" useful in assessing one's relations to others so as to structure communication behavior.

2. Followership, the extent to which one's news-judgment choices coincide with the audience's preferences as defined by the journalist.

3. Autonomy, the level of similarity between the journalist's own preferences and his/her news-judgment priorities.

Put figure 1 about here.

We expected, based on a review of applied-journalism literature, that traditionals would have little time or specialized expertise to develop clear-cut, firm positions of their own.[46] Further, we believed they would have been socialized to set aside or ignore what perspectives they had in order to remain "objective."[47]

Given the lack of well-established, useable personal viewpoints, it seemed, traditionals should tend to show high congruency between self and audience (based partly, perhaps, on an inclination to take the audience into account in the near-absence of other bases for developing whatever personal views they might construct). Interpreters and activists, on the other hand, would likely have research-or cause-based perspectives which could stand as alternatives to audience beliefs, reducing congruency.

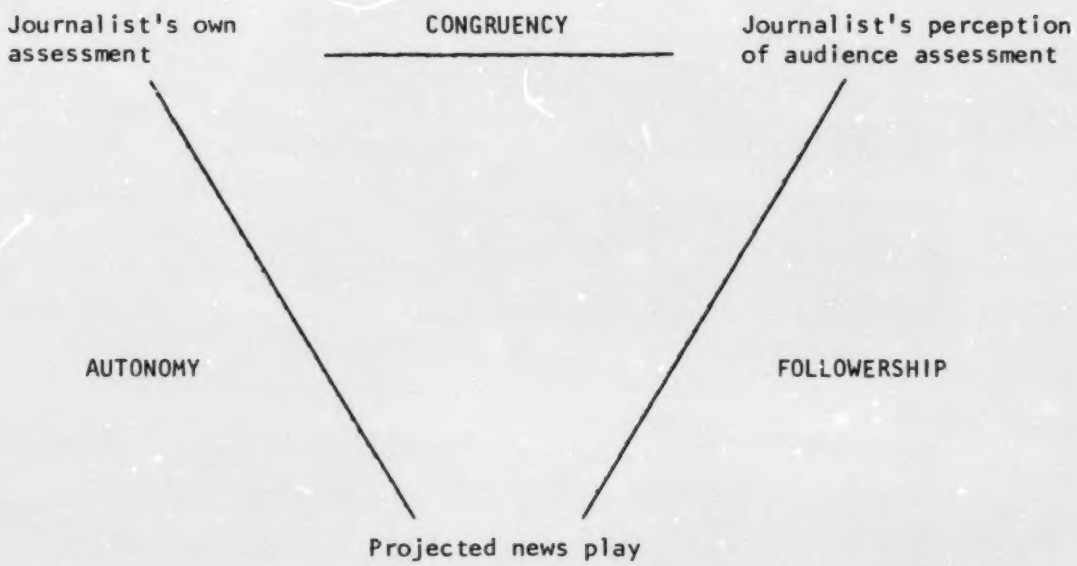
In light of the above, and a strong tendency on their part to view media outlets largely as profit-oriented businesses, traditionals should feel compelled to follow perceived audience preferences rather closely in making news-judgment decisions. Interpreters and activists, on the other hand, should have alternative bases to consider in news judgment, leading to relatively low followership.

In a nutshell, these hypotheses were generally supported.[48] However, predictions relating to the third variable in news-orientation, autonomy, were not borne out--a puzzling result.

It's probable that some developments in modern journalism (the advent of precision journalism[49] and new journalism,[50] as well as interpretative

FIGURE 1

The News-orientation Model



reporting) may lead gradually toward higher autonomy among journalists. At the same time, the ratings-oriented consulting business and publisher concern about declines in per-capita circulation[51] may tend to increase followership. In any case, the possible tug of war between autonomy and followership lies at the heart of many issues in applied communication.

Interpretative and activist trends appear to be reducing congruency and followership vis-a-vis audiences of at least some journalists. At the same time, PR types following the two-way symmetric model are presumably convincing clients more than ever to take audience viewpoints into account and follow them. Such trends could change the character of press-source relations in the years ahead.

Public relations people, like journalists, undoubtedly experience some tug of war between following own and following audience viewpoints. In PR, such concerns may be especially challenging and complex because of a need to attend to clients and numerous publics at the same time.

Osteopathic Study

In a second project, the author and Guido H. Stempel III examined the PR posture of osteopathic medicine in Ohio.

Taking the two-way symmetric model to heart, we conducted two surveys--one of 252 D.O.'s, a regular-interval sample drawn from the Ohio Osteopathic Association membership list; and another of 415 Ohioans selected through random digit dialing.

Drawing on psychological association theory,[52] we argued that a belief might warrant particular attention in PR practice if:

1. People who held it also defined doctors of osteopathy as credible when compared with "establishment" M.D.'s--the competition.

2. D.O.'s and the general-population sample disagreed, on the whole, with respect to the belief and related topics.

For illustrative purposes, we focus here on one topic which met both criteria--osteopathic manipulative therapy, the massaging of bones, joints and muscles. Long a cornerstone of osteopathy, manipulation is now seen by most D.O.'s as an important but ancillary type of treatment suitable only with a limited class of ailments. D.O.'s now get virtually as much training as M.D.'s in the use of drugs, surgery, radiation and related topics. Furthermore, D.O.'s are licensed, total-care physicians--a fact not understood by everyone.

We asked each D.O. to estimate the percentage of his/her patients who had manipulation in the D.O.'s own office during the past 12 months. There was considerable variation, indicating the profession's own viewpoint on manipulation needed clarification (a fact readily admitted by many D.O.'s in focus-group sessions and in-depth interviews). On the average, physicians estimated they'd manipulated 32% of their patients.

In the general-population study, Ohioans guesstimated whether Ohio D.O.'s today manipulated all, most, some, very few or none of their patients. In all, 38% said all or most--clearly denoting far more than the 32% figure provided by D.O.'s themselves. Thus about two-fifths of the general sample substantially over-estimated the apparent use of manipulation.

This constituted a genuine PR problem in light of another finding. Good-bad evaluation of manipulative therapy correlated positively with perceived D. O. credibility where people felt physicians manipulate some or fewer of their patients (gamma = .52, $p < .01$), but not with respondents

who felt D.O.'s manipulate all or most of the time. Apparently, then, people wanted manipulation only on appropriate occasions and saw a potential problem with its over-use.[53]

Other data also indicated clearly that D.O.'s knew of differences in perspective between themselves and the public. Such awareness, in turn, seemed apt to set the stage for physician support of a PR program. In follow-up consultation with leading physicians, we found them especially open to suggestions for action when we gave them evidence that physician and public perspectives differed plus evidence that their colleagues had "breadth of perspective" in that they knew of and expressed concern about these problems.[54]

State-Issues Survey

In a third study, the author and Stempel interviewed 451 Ohioans in the fall of 1983 about three controversial state issues on the November ballot. Respondents were chosen via random digit dialing and interviewed by phone over a three-week period ending two days before the November 8 election.

One state issue would have increased the minimum drinking age in the state from 18 to 21. Another would have repealed a 90% boost in state income tax passed by the state legislature several months earlier. And the final issue covered would have required a 60% majority in each house of the legislature to pass future revenue bills.

Several weeks before interviewing, we obtained campaign literature from the four interest groups spearheading campaigns for and against the three issues. (The tax issues were packaged together, with all leaders

but by no means all voters apparently assuming a vote for or against one would go along with a similar vote on the other.)

Prior to data collection, each interviewer became familiar with the arguments, pro and con, listed in the literature. Then arguments were sought, via unaided recall, from respondents by asking questions such as:

> Various politicians and citizens have been discussing pros and cons for state issues 1, 2 and 3 in recent weeks. Now we'd like to know what arguments come to your mind on both sides as you think about these issues.
>
> First, consider issue 1 which, if passed, would raise Ohio's minimum drinking age to 21 years. What specific arguments come to your mind as supporting issue 1? (Please give any arguments you can--whether you accept them as valid or not.)
>
> (Respondent answered. Then interviewer probed by saying, "Any other arguments in favor of issue 1?")
>
> Now, please give arguments which come to mind as opposing issue 1.

Interviewers checked arguments given which were on the prepared list and jotted down others (rarely offered, as it turned out) in a miscellaneous category. We'd asked each respondent whether he/she favored, opposed, or neither favored nor opposed each issue. Thus we were able to count the number of arguments advanced in support of, and the number opposed to, his/her own position. The "opposed to" figure gave at least a rough indication of awareness of and concern with a perspective opposed to one's own.

This strategy resembled the one used by Edelstein in a study of beliefs about the Vietnam War. He defined a person's knowledge structure as complex where that person could give both positive and negative values of a proposal to end the conflict.[55]

Arguments given for one's own position outnumbered those for the opposing view by 2 or 3 to 1 for each issue. This held for both pro and anti respondents. Thus Ohioans on the whole did not show very well-rounded, balanced mastery of pro and con positions.

In a further analysis, we asked people how often they viewed local and state political news on TV (frequently, sometimes, seldom or never). And we included a similar item about newspaper use.

Multiple-regression analyses with education and other situational variables (see figures 2 and 3) controlled yielded the following basic results:

1. Media use did not predict argument generation (in total, for own position, or for opposing position) with the drinking-age issue. This particular referendum appeared to receive relatively light media play. Only education level predicted argument generation (b = .25 for total arguments and for those opposed to own position, only .11 for arguments supporting one's personal opinion).

2. Looking at the two tax issues lumped together, frequency of TV use for news on local and state politics predicted total-argument generation (b = .24) and production of arguments supporting one's own view (b = .22). Newspaper use for local and state politics predicted only total-argument production (with a marginal b of .13). Neither newspaper nor TV use correlated significantly with generation of arguments opposed to one's own view.

3. Education, on the other hand, correlated with all three argument-generation variables, even with media use and situational factors controlled, on the tax issues.

4. Another analysis yielded intriguing results which relate to opposing arguments. We asked respondents the following on the combined tax issues:

> Now, let's move on to issues 2 and 3, both dealing with state tax legislation. Issue 2 would require a three-fifths majority in the Ohio legislature to pass revenue or tax laws. Issue 3 would repeal the income-tax increase passed in January 1983 by the Ohio legislature. Would you say you have gotten the most information about issues 2 and 3 from newspapers? Radio? Television? Magazines? Other people you've talked with? Public meetings? Or where?

Put figures 2 and 3 about here.

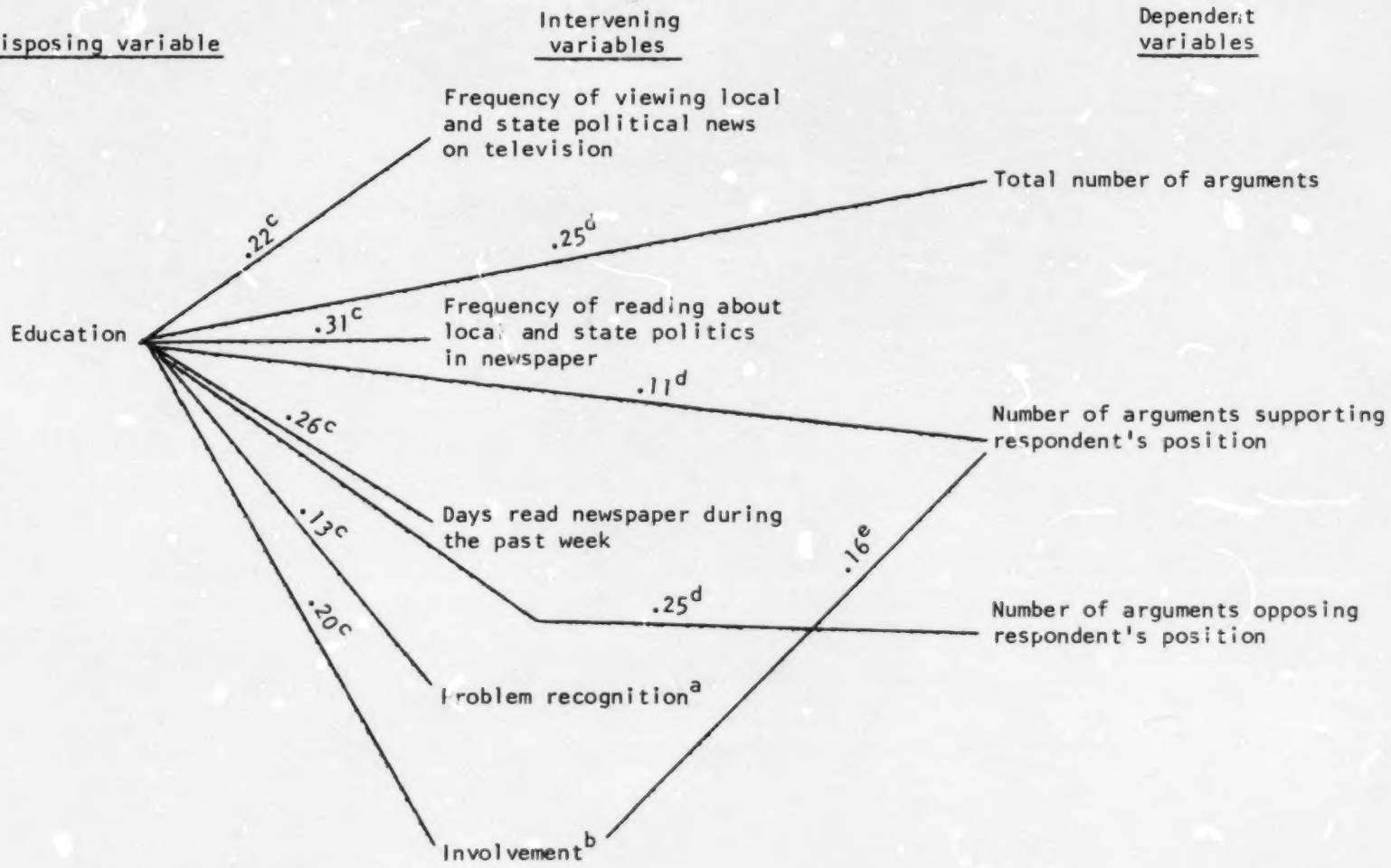
This item permitted us to identify 120 TV-dependent respondents and 121 newspaper-dependents vis-a-vis these issues. TV use did correlate with number of opposing arguments produced ($r = .30$, $p < .01$) for newspaper-dependent persons only. Also, newspaper use approached significance as a predictor to opposing viewpoints ($r = .14$, $p = .09$) for newspaper-dependent persons. These associations held with education partialed out. However, neither media-use variable correlated with generation of opposed arguments among TV-dependent persons. Apparently newspaper-dependent folks used the media (including TV), when they did so, in a thorough, critical way which at least sometimes helped make them aware of perspectives opposed to their own. This squares with the oft-noted (but also oft-ignored) notion that practitioners should not judge the probable impact of a medium solely on the basis of total audience size.

Conclusions

One element not stressed here but clearly needing attention in future studies is accuracy of perception of viewpoints other than one's own.

FIGURE 2

Path Model of Factors Correlating with Argument Generation on 1983 Ohio State Issue About Raising Drinking Age



Addendum to Figure 2

[a]This variable stemmed from one item asking how much effort the respondent felt was needed to make up his/her mind on whether the issue was good or bad. Response options were a great deal, some, a little, and no effort at all.

[b]This variable stemmed from a single item asking to what extent the respondent saw a connection between him or herself, personally, and the state issue. Options were strong, moderate, weak, and none at all.

[c]This is a zero-order correlation between education, the sole predisposing variable, and one of the five intervening variables.

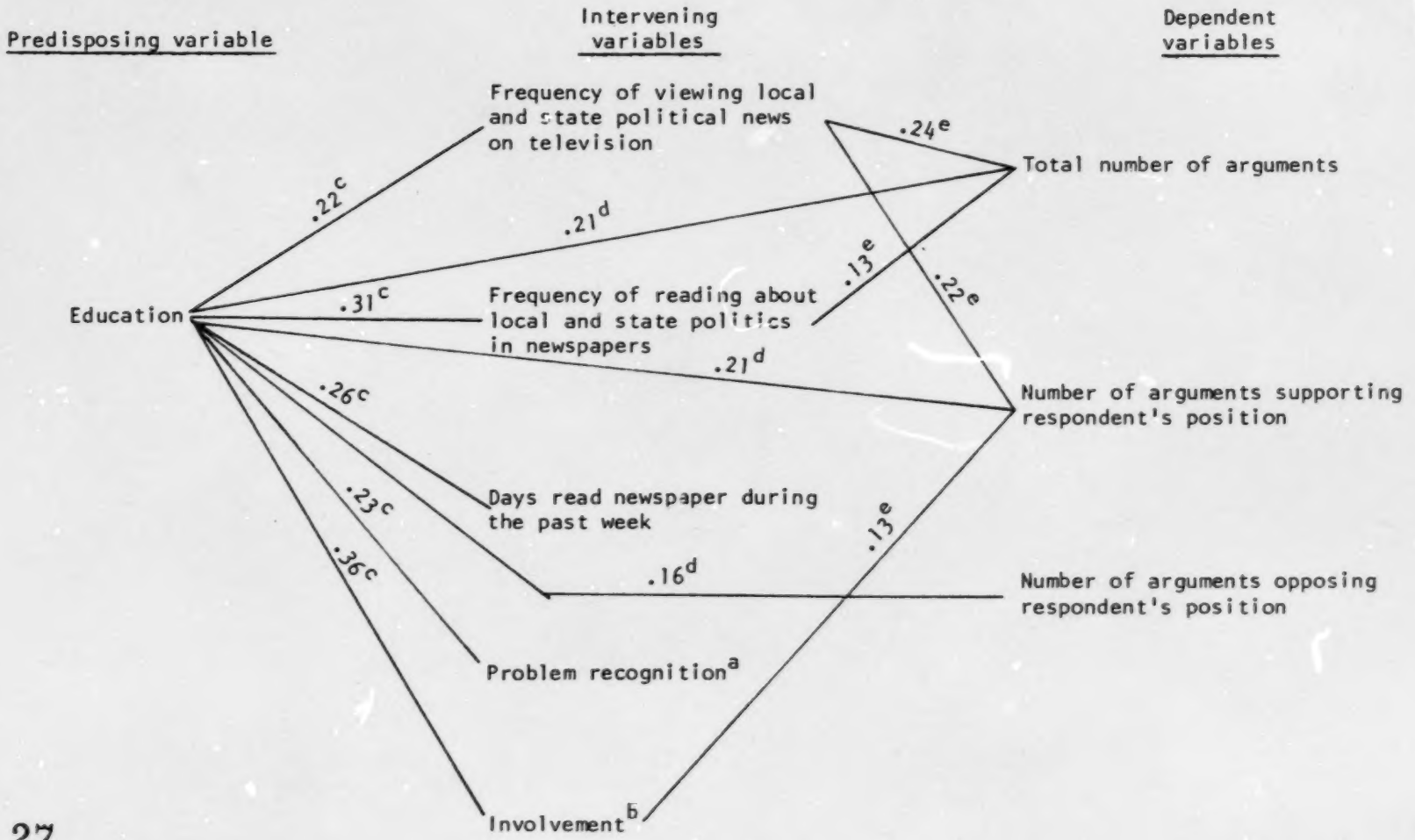
[d]This is a standardized regression coefficient linking education to a dependent variable with all intervening factors controlled.

[e]This is a standardized regression coefficient linking one intervening variable to one dependent measure with the other intervening factors controlled.

All coefficients reported are significant at $p < .05$. All significant paths are shown.

FIGURE 3

Path Model of Factors Correlating with Argument Generation
on 1983 Ohio State Issues on Tax Revenue



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Bowes and Stamm have suggested that, in public relations, accuracy in the absence of agreement between client and public can prove important.[56] Furthermore, as Klapper's oft-quoted and never fully debunked statement of the minimum-effects model of mass communication implied,[57] changing opinions so public and client agree may be difficult at best. However, improved accuracy of public perception regarding a client's stands and policies may often be an attainable goal because it does not require change in the public's own attitudes and opinions.

It's also clear that level of congruency between own and other's view can create PR problems. Perfect (the highest possible) congruency allows for no difference between self and other--an assumption which communication theory suggests is usually inaccurate (after all, no two people have identical environments or learning experiences).[58] Ethnocentrism or egocentrism results.

At the other extreme, lack of any perceived similarity between self and perceived other offers little basis for seeking compromise or shared meaning. This state has been called polarization. Like its opposite, extremely low congruency can prove maladaptive.[59]

Ehling has argued persuasively before this body that conflict management is a central focus, if not the defining focus, of public relations as a coherent field of study.[60] And conflict, by its nature, seems to imply some awareness and addressing of differing viewpoints, plans, goals and perspectives.

"Breadth of perspective" also deals with such awareness. It helps provide a context for study of conflict by clarifying that two viewpoints or perspectives can have any one of at least four relations to each other:

1. Irrelevance. Here holding one view would have no bearing on the holding of another.

2. Supplementarity. Here holding one view would encourage holding of another. At the inter-personal level, persons having supplementary viewpoints might operate with what group dynamicists call promotive interdependence (where success by one person would promote success by the other).[61]

3. Actual conflict. Here the two people who have conflicting views would operate in a condition of contrient interdependence (with validation of beliefs held by one leading to disconfirmation of beliefs held by the other, and vice versa).[62] Intrapersonally, this amounts to cognitive dissonance.[63]

4. Conflict based on misunderstanding. Here one or both parties perceive conflict in viewpoints, but the perception is inaccurate.

Obviously condition 3 poses intractable problems in that it requires change or accommodation in one or both personally held perspectives. Condition 4, on the other hand, may involve changing only the perception of one person or group by another. Such change may both add to and depend upon breadth of perspective by the perceiver. Clearly PR (and conflict-management) strategies are going to differ from one condition to the next.

Breadth of perspective and conflict management also seem to share a concern for the notion of uncertainty. Handling conflict (or avoiding it) may often (though not always) lead to a concern for uncertainty reduction (the attainment of resolutions which varied parties agree with wholeheartedly and will support). However, a focus on breadth of perspectives can lead one to ask if uncertainty enhancement is not sometimes a fruitful PR goal leading to greater information seeking and

tolerance. Chaffee and Wilson implied as much in their innovative study of news-agenda diversity as indexed with the H-statistic in information theory. H has high values, in their conceptualization, where a) a person or group attaches high importance to news items in a large number of topic categories, and b) items and item assignments do not cluster largely in any one or a few of these categories.[64]

Perhaps journalism and public relations share a broad concern, usually implicit, for uncertainty enhancement in many (not all) circumstances. Advertisers and marketers, on the other hand, may focus largely on uncertainty reduction as implied by the notion of brand loyalty (sticking with a given product unquestioningly over time). At least, this concept merits further discussion in defining various disciplines.

Breadth of perspective seems especially important in defining PR goals if one buys the widely held view that the truly professional practitioner must promote the welfare of society as well as the client. The author has argued that professionalism requires concern for truth of overall impression as well as truth of fact.[65] The public seemingly is entitled to both types of truth--even when there are few competent, assertive media people or informed citizens to help insure the libertarian's "free marketplace of ideas" will correct untruths or imbalances. This strongly suggests an obligation for PR people to strive for breadth as well as depth of public knowledge.[66]

An important goal for future research, it would seem, is to determine whether, in fact, the four suggested components of breadth of perspective correlate so that concept can be viewed as a single dimension. Included here are awareness that different views are possible, that they do exist,

that viewpoints other than one's own often need to be considered when making plans and drawing conclusions, and of arguments opposed to one's own view.

The author's three projects noted earlier have dealt separately with the last three of these components. The newspaper-attitude study focused on taking views other than the journalist's own into account (tapped by followership), the osteopathic study with awareness that views opposed to one's (in this case, physicians') own do exist, and the state-issues study with knowledge of opposing arguments. Unfortunately, two facets of breadth of perspectives were seldom analyzed in the same project so as to permit examining inter-correlations among them.

As shown in figure 4, research and theorizing to date suggest at least five possible mechanisms or processes through which various antecedents may affect the third and fourth components of "breadth of perspective" listed in the preceding paragraph. These components are willingness to take others' views into account and knowledge of arguments and viewpoints distinct from one's own. (Theory about and evidence relating to components one and two seem limited at present.)

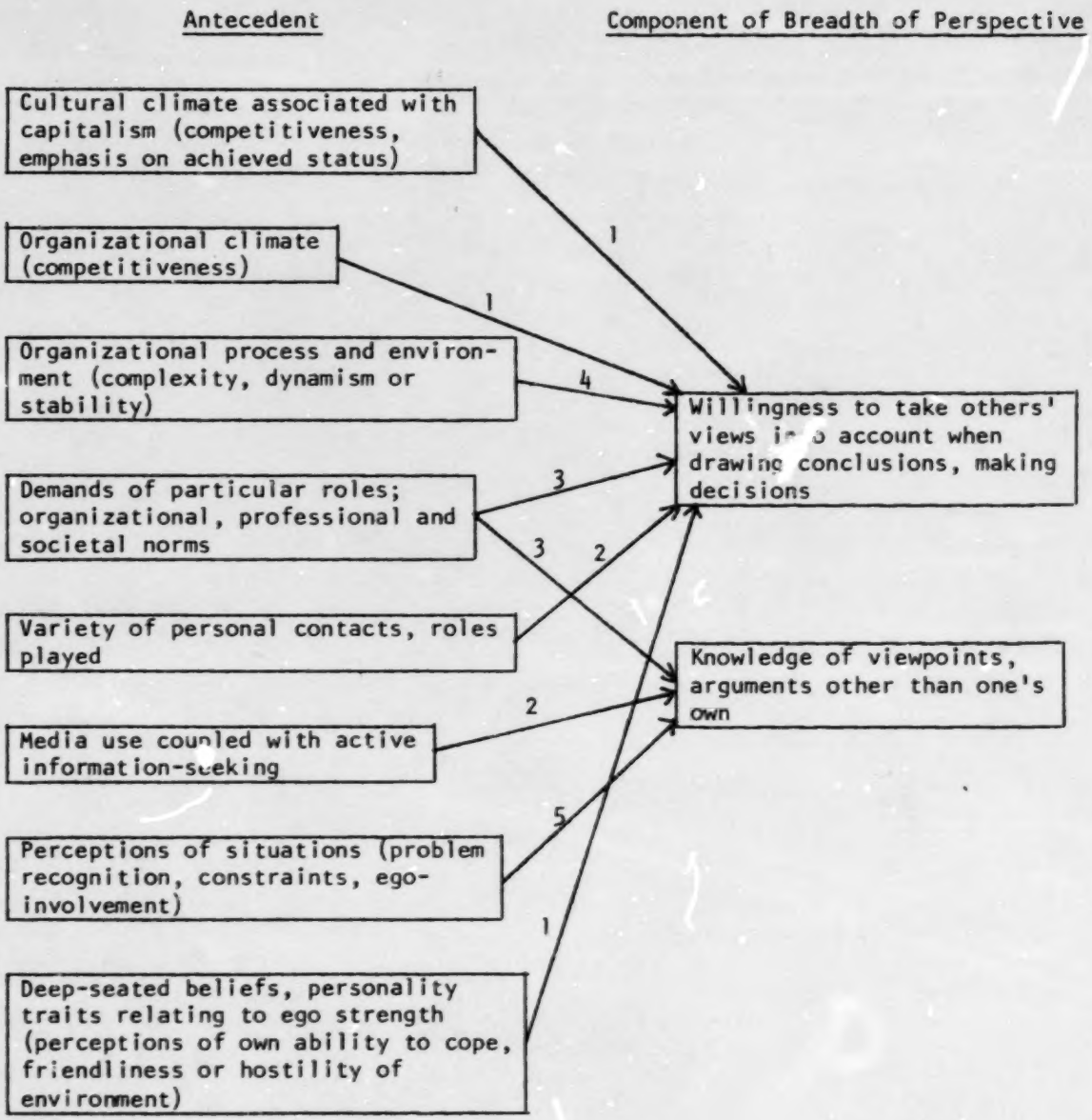
Put figure 4 about here.

Where the number before a given paragraph below appears on a line within figure 4, the process described in that paragraph appears to link a given "breadth component" with an antecedent connected to it by the line. Processes are as follows:

1. Three levels of analysis varying widely on a micro-macro continuum suggest that a feeling of low self-confidence and/or of being threatened in a given situation can reduce willingness to expose oneself actively,

FIGURE 4

Antecedents Suggested in Behavioral-Science Literature as Contributing to Two Components of Breadth of Perspective*


Antecedent
Component of Breadth of Perspective
Cultural climate associated with capitalism (competitiveness, emphasis on achieved status)
Organizational climate (competitiveness)
Organizational process and environment (complexity, dynamism or stability)
Demands of particular roles; organizational, professional and societal norms
Variety of personal contacts, roles played
Media use coupled with active information-seeking
Perceptions of situations (problem recognition, constraints, ego-involvement)
Deep-seated beliefs, personality traits relating to ego strength (perceptions of own ability to cope, friendliness or hostility of environment)
Willingness to take others' views into account when drawing conclusions, making decisions
Knowledge of viewpoints, arguments other than one's own
1
1
4
3
3
2
2
5
1

*The number appearing above a given line denotes the paragraph on pages 28-31 which describes a mechanism linking the antecedent and consequent connected in the figure by that line.

honestly and fully to diverse viewpoints. At a very macro level, Henry blames much of what he calls "wooly-mindedness" and deceit in America on the society's emphasis on achieved rather than ascribed status.[67] This is said to contribute to and stem partly from competitiveness inherent in capitalism. Such a climate, he argues, leads to heavy emphasis on functionality (whether something works) rather than truth-seeking.[68] At the micro level, psychologists in the authoritarian-personality tradition have frequently mentioned a lack of self-confidence and ego strength (and an associated feeling that the world is a hostile environment) as bases for parochialism and lack of openness to diverse views.[69] And in organizational theory, Argyris has cited competitveness and attendant feelings of being threatened within a given organization--the "win-lose dynamic"--as a key to much organizational inefficiency associated with a failure of managers to communicate fully with each other and pertinent publics.[70]

2. Two areas of research center on a combination of past exposure to diverse messages and felt need to seek information actively as antecedents. Sociological and organizational studies reviewed earlier suggest that playing varied roles and making varied contacts sometimes enhance and sometimes reduce inclinations to take varied viewpoints into account.[71] And data reported earlier by the author on public response to a state-issues referendum campaign suggested that media exposure correlated with generation of arguments opposed to one's own view where and only where the respondent was newspaper-oriented (hence probably relatively active as an information seeker, based on past research[72]).

3. At times, the demands of particular roles played, along with related organizational, vocational and societal norms, have appeared to bear on taking others' views into account. In the author's research on news personnel, adherence to traditional ideas about the role of modern journalism went along with reported inclinations to follow one's audience.[73] In Mathews' study of old folks' homes, "custodial" professionals appeared to ignore or downgrade the viewpoints of the elderly partly because their (the professionals') legitimacy hinged in part on a belief that the elderly were incapable of having important aspirations and goals.[74] Also, the "civic attitude scale" presented by McCombs and Poindexter appears to tap a set of beliefs, apparently quite widely held in western societies, stressing the need to be informed about arguments from varied locations and viewpoints--transcending one's personal, localized interests.[75]

4. Organizational theories advanced by Hage,[76] Grunig[77] and others suggest that complexity and dynamism or stability of an organization's environment--as well as of its inner workings--bear in complex ways on tendencies to be diachronic or synchronic, to ignore or heed the divergent views of key publics.

5. Grunig's earlier work on information-systems theory, centering on problem recognition, constraints and level of personal involvement as factors to be considered when individuals and organizations define particular situations, at least hinted that active information seeking can, under some circumstances, aid learning about diverse options (i. e., perspectives).[78] One facet of such learning may be "hedging," holding of diverse views with differing attitudinal implications.[79] Hedging appears to entail holding

of differing (perhaps inconsistent) views as one's own--a possible by-product of Turner's role-taking from a first-person standpoint.[80] Breadth of perspective, however, entails accepting one view as one's own and recognizing a difference between that and other positions. Such recognition, it appears, requires what Turner would call role-taking from the third-person standpoint.[81]

In the author's state-issues study reported earlier, personal involvement correlated positively and significantly with generation of arguments in support of respondents' own views on all issues. There was no correlation between involvement and number of opposed arguments produced. Problem and constraint recognition did not predict any argument-generation variables, but this cannot be considered a meaningful test of Grunig's theory. In general, a high proportion of respondents rated problem recognition as low, constraint recognition as high. Few people fell in the category of problem-facing (high problem and low constraint recognition) which the theory suggests should entail intense, active information seeking.

Certainly the theoretical clarity of and empirical support for such mechanisms varies. However, the model in figure 4 would seem promising as a basis for organizing and stimulating future research.

Why is breadth of perspective important in public relations? There appear to be at least three reasons:

1. It's in line with America's libertarian heritage. As long noted by press scholars, this view emphasizes the need for a free marketplace of ideas in which the important and trivial, the true and untrue can meet in open competition.[82] Given this view and a concern with society as well as one's boss or client,[83] breadth of perspective has value in its own

right as a goal for professional public relations. The goal has relevance to the practitioner, the client or boss, pertinent publics, and relations among these entities.

2. It can, apparently, lead under many circumstances to productive, flexible, innovative behavior and output as suggested by Hage[84] and demonstrated by Pelz and Andrews.[85] In a related vein, former President Richard M. Nixon has suggested that schooling in, mastery of, and ability to integrate contrasting perspectives can contribute to progressive, successful leadership. For example, Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida formed a unique partnership in rebuilding Japan after World War II partly because both men had lived and studied in the West and the Orient, permitting them to form a blend of elements of the two contrasting worlds.[86] Zhou Enlai of China was an effective leader partly because he subscribed to Communist orthodoxy as well as ancient Chinese customs and tradition.[87] And Konrad Adenauer of West Germany was said to have balanced loyalty to his homeland with "an affection for things French."[88]

3. It can help articulate and add substance to the two-way symmetric model of public relations practice. Grunig and Hunt argue persuasively that this model represents a real step forward in many contexts for the evolving public relations function.[89]

In conclusion, it is worth noting that entertainment of varied perspectives is not presented as a universal good. There are doubtless times (as when one is caught in a burning theater) when action, not

weighing of alternatives, is the key to success or survival. Too much weighing may leave little time for meaningful behavior. However, the concept seems applicable in many public relations settings.

Notes

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